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Correction Appended

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HEADLINE: Black mayoral choice lacking;
Effort to agree on viable challenger to O'Malley less than successful;
Mayor's fund-raiser tonight;
Bundley only candidate to declare; others 'still mulling' whether to run

BYLINE: Doug Donovan and Tom Pelton

SOURCE: SUN STAFF

BODY:

An effort to forge agreement on a viable African-American opponent to Mayor Martin O'Malley has failed so far, and O'Malley plans to bolster his campaign tonight with a \$1 million fund-raiser.

"At this point, O'Malley is way out there" in front of other possible candidates, said state Sen. Nathaniel J. McFadden. "If the objective is to have the best mayor, it's going to be hard to beat O'Malley. If the objective is to get a black mayor, those who say they are running have to make some tough decisions and make them quickly."

With the primary less than four months away, and the filing deadline for candidates June 20, little-known Walbrook High School Principal Andrey Bundley is the only official challenger. Although some political figures had expected state Sen. Joan Carter Conway to announce her candidacy by tomorrow, she said yesterday she's not ready to decide.

"I don't know where everyone came up with that mythical date of May 15," said Conway. "I'm still mulling. I don't want to say I'm not running or that, yes, I am running."

She said she did not expect to make a decision this week or next, but added that she would seriously consider running if she were considered the consensus candidate.

On May 7, a predominantly black group gathered at The Forum catering hall on Primrose Avenue to find such a candidate. In attendance were Bundley, Conway and other potential candidates: car dealer Scott Donahoo; Circuit Court Clerk Frank Conaway; and State's Attorney Patricia C. Jessamy. Carl Stokes, who lost to O'Malley in 1999, did not

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attend but sent a representative.

Many at the meeting said yesterday that they believed a second such "consensus" meeting had been scheduled for tonight. But last week's host and owner of The Forum, Raymond V. Haysbert, denied that.

"I am not aware of any meeting, and we hold the key (to The Forum)," said Haysbert, chairman of the Greater Baltimore Urban League and Conway's campaign treasurer. "Some unknown party is going around telling people that there is a meeting at 7 p.m. I will probably be at O'Malley's fund-raiser."

Bundley also is holding a fund-raiser tonight, at Southern Blues restaurant on Howard Street. While O'Malley donors are paying up to \$4,000 to attend his event at Ravens stadium, Bundley is charging a top price of \$40.

"We wanted to show the difference between a \$40 event and a \$4,000 event," said Julius Henson, Bundley's campaign manager.

Although Stokes is also expected to officially announce tomorrow or Friday that he will challenge O'Malley, he has been sending mixed signals since declaring his interest two weeks ago.

At first, he said he would not challenge O'Malley if Conway emerged as a consensus candidate. In the past week, however, he said he will run no matter what. Yesterday, he said he had not made a decision on announcing to "allow for a couple of days for consensus."

Labor's sympathies

Glenard S. Middleton Sr., president of the local American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees labor union, said that he doesn't know whether Conway will run. But he added that labor would tend to be more sympathetic to her candidacy than O'Malley's because the mayor has laid off union workers, privatized some city functions and demanded that workers pay more for their health insurance.

"She's been the voice of labor and knows about the issues that are important to labor," Middleton said.

McFadden said he has had an excellent relationship with both O'Malley and Conway, but he added that defeating the mayor would be difficult because there are only four months until the primary and because he has done an excellent job.

Slim chances seen

"You can't have everyone in the world running," McFadden said. "Bundley, Stokes and Joan (Carter Conway) are considering it strongly. If that's the scenario, I don't think a black candidate has a chance of getting this mayor's office back."

The City Council president's race is also the subject of much speculation. Incumbent Sheila Dixon does not yet face formidable challengers, although two possible contenders are considering running.

Councilwoman Catherine E. Pugh has been meeting with community and political leaders to gauge interest in her possible candidacy.

And members of ACORN, the community and union organization that spearheaded the drive to reduce the size of the council, are busy trying to recruit state Del. Jill P. Carter to challenge Dixon.

"I know there's a movement afoot, and I'm flattered by it," Carter said. "If it's the people's will for me to do it, then I would strongly consider it."

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CORRECTION:

Because of an editing error, an article yesterday about Baltimore's mayoral primary campaign incorrectly reported the filing deadline for candidates. The deadline is June 30. The Sun regrets the error.

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